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Senate

Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I join my colleague, Senator Sarbanes, in voicing my thanks for the work that has been done on the legislation before us today, and certainly to Senator Inhofe and his staff and Senator Jeffords and his staff.

As a member of the Senate Banking Committee, it has really been a pleasure for me these last 12 months to work with our new chairman—well, not so new chairman—Senator Shelby and our ranking member, former chairman, Senator Sarbanes, as we have attempted to craft any number of pieces of legislation. Last year, the Fair Credit Reporting Act, which I described yesterday, with Senator Shelby, was just a model in the way we should be creating legislation in a badly divided Congress these days.

I don't know if the bill before us is going to be held out as a model for crafting legislation, but my hope is the product is going to be a good one for us and for our country.

I would like to speak for a few minutes about the transit provisions of this bill and then to talk a bit about our support as a nation for rail transportation and whether or not we have provided the right support and

sense of priority for rail, be it freight rail or passenger rail.

Let's go back to the 1970s when something called the Urban Mass Transit Administration was created. We talk about legislation. We didn't have ISTEA; we didn't have TEA-21; we had a highway bill. Every several years the Congress would pass a highway bill. Even after the Urban Mass Transit Administration was created, we would pass in the Congress from time to time a highway bill.

In due course, the Urban Mass Transit Administration became the Federal Transit Administration. Somewhere I believe in the 1980s, the Federal Transit Administration funding was joined with the highway bill to become a transportation bill and we began taking money. Today I think it is a little less than 3 cents for every gallon of gasoline that is sold that will be allocated to the Federal Transit Administration to support mass transit services, including buses, including rail and a variety of other transit services.

With respect to the transit provisions of this bill, I think they represent our growing awareness that while roads and bridges and highways are important and we still love our cars in this country—cars, trucks, and vans—more and more people are using transit. It is a good thing they are. With the

kind of congestion we have on our highways, with the kind of dependence on foreign oil and the kind of problems with air pollution, it certainly makes sense to have people get out of the cars, trucks, and vans to use transit to go to work or go shop or go to a ball game or any variety of other purposes.

I would like us to think of our transportation system in this country holistically for just a moment. It includes our highways, our roads, our bridges. It also includes transit. Last year we spent a fair amount of time reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration. In doing so, a variety of related programs, including the airport improvement program, were reauthorized. You may recall we fund aviation improvements, and particularly airport improvements, from a variety of user fees and some general fund moneys.

Last year we focused on aviation and how to improve our aviation component of our transportation system. This week we are focusing on highways and roads. Today we are focusing a bit on transit.

At a day and age in which some 16 percent of our freight in this country is shipped by rail, all told over 40 percent of our total ton miles of intercity freight go by rail, we have not yet seen fit to say the Federal Government should have some interest, more than just a passing interest, in helping to support, to nurture the rail component of our transportation system.

Later, probably not this week but I suspect next week, we will have the opportunity to consider that question: What kind of attention, what kind of support should we in the Congress and in this country be providing for freight rail service? What kind of support should we be

providing in this country for passenger rail service?

Amtrak has just concluded a year where they had the highest ridership in the history of the company. More than 24 million people rode intercity passenger trains, and they had the highest revenue, I believe, for any year in their history as well.

We spend a whole lot of time from year to year in this body talking about passenger rail service and Amtrak. We really don't focus much on freight rail. I would have us keep in mind, in a day and age where we are using some 55 percent of the oil we use to run our cars, trucks, and vans, 55 percent of it comes from foreign sources.

You can take 1 ton of freight, put it on a train here in Washington, DC, and take it up to Boston, MA, and you use 1 gallon of diesel fuel. Let me say that again. You take 1 ton of freight, put it on a freight train here in Washington, DC, take it up the Northeast corridor to Boston, MA, and that train will use 1 gallon of diesel fuel to move a ton of freight by rail.

As Governor of Delaware, I was involved a whole lot in trying to improve our highways, our roads, our bridges. There has been a lot of State money and, frankly, a good deal of Federal money. We are always grateful for that partnership. We invest a considerable amount of money in transit services. We invest State money in airports along with Federal money.

We also invested State money in rail transportation projects. We did not have as a partner in those rail transportation projects the Federal Government. However, if it were a highway project, for every 20 cents we put up, the Federal Government would put up 80 cents to match. If we had the opportunity to

choose between projects where we were getting an 80-20 match, an 80-cent match for our 20 cents on a highway project, and we had the option of putting our money and no Federal money in a rail project, the funding formula just automatically skewed our decision-making.

We may have had a rail project that made a whole lot more sense for our State, got a whole lot better bang for the buck than the highway project, but we were inclined and encouraged to use the money for the highway project because of a far better return, 80 to 20 versus nothing for our 100 cents.

What I think some of us will be really asked to think about next week is whether it makes sense to say the Federal Government should be at least a modest partner in encouraging the utilization of freight rail—greater utilization of freight rail. Today, the role is almost zero.

I believe we can do better than that. There are a whole lot of different approaches, different ideas and thoughts about creating an entity that would issue bonds. The interest on those bonds would be paid for by the Federal Government through tax credits. The entity issuing those bonds would be essentially paid. There has been discussion of adding an extra penny or so to the Federal gas tax and using those funds to support rail in some context.

I know when I served on the impact board—and former Governor Tommy Thompson preceded me—he and I both suggested an extra half cent or so to the gas tax to provide additional money for capital investments for infrastructure. We thought that made sense.

We may be asking our colleagues next week to look at an approach that suggests maybe a source of funding through a gasoline tax. I don't think creating an entity to issue new debt is the answer, at least not now—but to look for some source of funding that would provide some money for the next 6 years to States that have identified good rail projects, freight rail, or even passenger rail, which makes sense for those States; if they are willing to put up their money in order to match moneys from a Federal grant through the U.S. Department of Transportation, I think that is an idea that may not have had a lot of merit several years ago.

But, when you travel the highways around here or Delaware or Vermont or Maryland, I suspect even some places in Oklahoma, Missouri, Massachusetts, we see congestion on our roads the likes of which we have not seen in our lifetimes. When you travel to airports, whether it is in Philadelphia, or BWI, or other places around the country, the kind of congestion we see is congestion I have never seen in my lifetime, and the kinds of delays we are facing I have never seen in my lifetime.

When I got out of the Navy in 1973 and got off active duty and moved from California to Delaware, about 30 percent of the oil used in Delaware back then in this country that year was oil we got from overseas.

When we can move a ton of freight from Washington, DC to Boston on a freight train and use one gallon of diesel, that certainly says to me there are some lessons for fuel economy in this day and age that we ought to pay attention to.

Senator Jeffords has provided great leadership with respect to clean air issues.

We are wrestling and wrangling before the committee on what is the right approach. We have seen improvements in certain aspects of air quality. In the Northeast, we still have huge problems with respect to smog and nitrogen oxide; great problems with respect to mercury. I believe others here will agree to disagree that global warming is a growing concern. But in that kind of environment, the notion that we as a nation should be interested in fostering and encouraging a greater dependence on rail—freight and passenger—to move people and to move goods is I think the right notion.

I want to close by going back to where I started.

Again, we worked a whole lot last year on aviation. This week we are working on highways, roads, and bridges, and that certainly is appropriate. During today's debate, hopefully we will introduce transit into the fray. That is another important component of our transportation system that should get special attention. I don't know how long I am going to be in the Senate. I hope I will be here for a while. But I am going to keep reminding my colleagues that rail deserves a place at the table. If we provide that place, without even providing a huge amount of money, I think we are going to find our country and our respective States are well served by that attention.